

Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY LAGOS

INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 079494

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, UK, NI

SUBJECT: BRITISH OPPOSE GOWON'S EXTRADITION TO NIGERIA

REFS: LONDON 04268, LAGOS 3776, 3855

1. DURING MARCH 30-31 REVIEW OF AFRICAN AFFAIRS BY REPRESENTATIVES OF AF AND COUNTERPARTS FROM BRITISH FCO LATTER VOLUNTEERED FOLLOWING ON QUESTION OF GENERAL GOWON'S QUOTE EXTRADITION UNQUOTE: GARBA HAD QUOTE FRIENDLY TALK UNQUOTE WITH CALLAGHAN IN QUOTE GOOD ATMOSPHERE UNQUOTE. GARBA PRESENTED LETTER FROM OBASANJO TO WILSON REQUESTING HMG QUOTE FACILITATION UNQUOTE FOR GOWON'S DEPARTURE. LETTER DID NOT USE WORD EXTRADITION. GARBA TOLD PRESS AFTER THE MEETING THAT CALLAGHAN HAD MADE SOME INDICATION THAT FMG REQUEST WOULD BE FAVORABLY ACTED UPON, BUT IN FACT CALLAGHAN RESPONSE TO GARBA HAD BEEN TOTALLY NONCOMMITTAL.

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2. SIR ANTHONY DUFF, LEADER OF THE BRITISH DELEGATION,

THEN SAID QUOTE WE ARE NOT GOING TO SEND GOWON BACK UNQUOTE. IF FORMAL PROCEDURE FOLLOWED THROUGH COURTS AND RULING GOES AGAINST GOWON, IT WOULD STILL BE QUOTE EXTREMELY UNLIKELY UNQUOTE THAT HE WOULD ACTUALLY HAVE TO LEAVE UK. EVEN IF REMANDED IN CUSTODY BY COURT ORDER, ACTUAL RETURN TO NIGERIA WOULD STILL REQUIRE DECISION OF HOME SECRETARY WHO ALMOST CERTAINLY WOULD RULE AGAINST EXTRADITION.

3. THE BRITISH FEAR THAT THEIR RELATIONS WITH NIGERIA MAY DETERIORATE FURTHER AS RESULT OF IMPASSE FORESEEN OVER GOWON. FOR EXAMPLE, UK COMMERCIAL AND ECONOMIC INTERESTS SO FAR QUOTE ALMOST UNAFFECTED UNQUOTE BUT FMG HAS QUOTE DELICATELY INDICATED UNQUOTE THAT THEY ARE THREATENED IF GOWON REQUEST TURNED DOWN. WHEN BRITISH INDUSTRY COMPLAINS, THE NIGERIAN PRESS WILL REACT UNFAVORABLY, AND THE FMG QUOTE WILL TAKE IT OUT ON US UNQUOTE. IN SHORT, THE OBASANJO REGIME QUOTE HAS UNLEASHED SOMETHING IT CANNOT CONTROL UNQUOTE.

4. ON NIGERIA IN GENERAL, FCO OPINED THAT THE EVENTS OF THE LAST EIGHT MONTHS HAVE DESTROYED HOPE THAT THE CIVIL WAR HAD CREATED NEW BASIS FOR NIGERIAN STABILITY. RECOVERY FROM THE RECENT COUP ATTEMPT IS LIKELY TO BE VERY SLOW BECAUSE (1) ETHNIC STABILITY IN THE ARMY HAS BEEN LOST, (2) PRESENT REGIME LACKS GOWON'S MAGNANIMITY, AND (3) SECTIONAL DIFFERENCES OUTSIDE THE ARMY ARE STILL WIDE AND DEEP. OBASANJO'S MOST IMPORTANT TASK IS TO RESTORE ETHNIC STABILITY IN ARMY, BUT HE MAY NOT ACHIEVE THIS.

5. ADDITIONAL NOTE: ACCORDING BRITISH, HAUSA IN KANO STATE WERE SO TENSE IN IMMEDIATE AFTERMATH OF THE FEBRUARY 13 COUP ATTEMPT THAT BLOODY POGROM AGAINST THE YORUBA VERY NEARLY OCCURRED.

6. FINAL NOTE: AT THE TIME OF THE DELEGATION'S DEPARTURE FROM LONDON EARLY THIS WEEK, HMG WAS EXPECTING SECOND ROUND OF EXECUTIONS TO TAKE PLACE AT ANY TIME EVEN THOUGH THEY HAD ALREADY BEEN POSTPONED ONCE.

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7. MEMORANDUM OF US-UK TALKS WILL BE POUCHED.

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